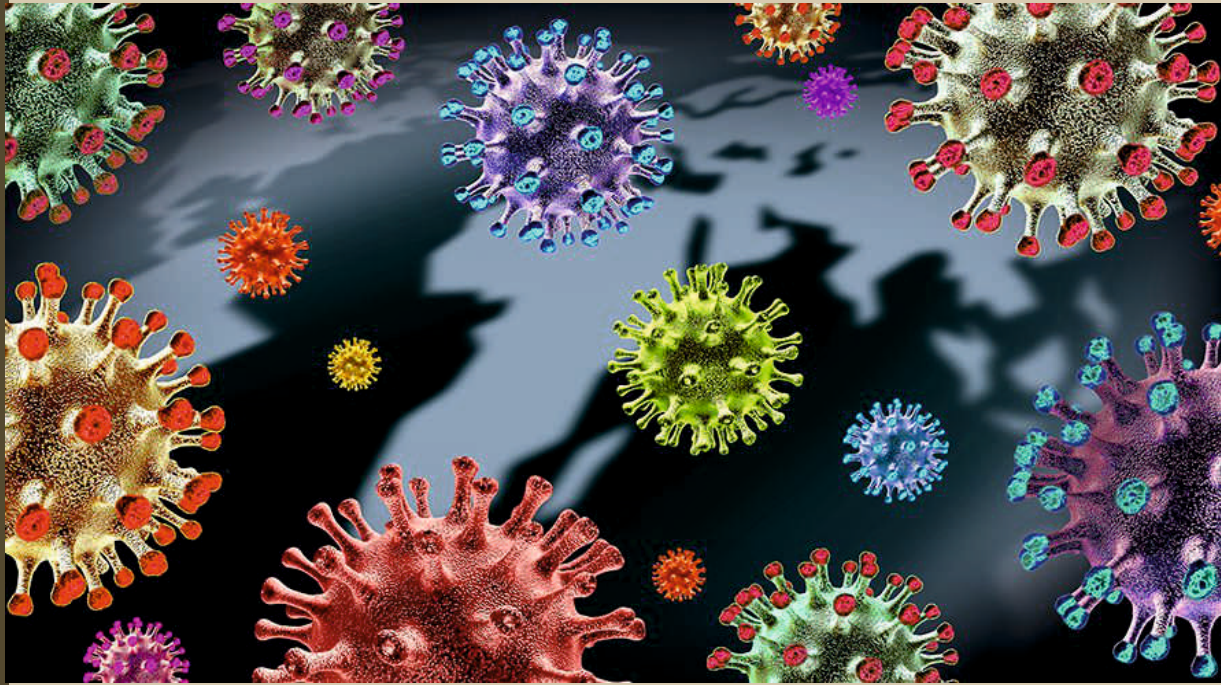


Humanity in the Covid-19 Era



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NINTH KRISHNA BHATTACHARYA MEMORIAL LECTURE 2022

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It is a great pleasure to address the well-known dignitaries, who have made valuable contribution towards social causes and are associated with Krishna Trust. I am also deeply moved while listening to the account of the common people who carried out outstanding job during the Covid-19 period against all odds risking their own lives. They made this world look brighter even during that gloomy period one can thus fairly say that humanity was at its best.

1

The most remarkable aspect of this humanitarian endeavour that leaves us silent in respect relates to the narratives presented by the women participants in the programme organised by Krishna Trust. These narratives brought out the glorious role played by women social workers in

rural Bengal and the demonstration of their work ethics. Women belonging to minority communities excelled their male counterparts in their contributions while facing this public health emergency. Their commitment and grit have proved that women's power in Bengal can face any challenge on its own.

2

Covid-19 has impacted human life in all possible ways. It has virtually destroyed the normal structure of societies across the globe. The living and working conditions have been adversely affected. While most studies have focussed on the prevailing negative consequences, the potential positive shifts in everyday life have received less attention. Let us start with the story where young kids in rural Bengal were nearly starving as their parents could not afford the most basic food material

owing to the poverty stricken village economy to reeling further under - lockdown condition. Middle classes did not remain totally aloof. More importantly, women in large number came out to provide food for the children.

In a situation of grave crisis, a group of young women belonging to the minority community in and around Rajabazar area displayed their indomitable spirit to challenge the usual male narrative by forming a football club for women. All obstacles in this regard could be removed by this resilient group of rebels. The local slums of an area in Howrah started producing school bags and similar products on mass scale and offered them at a cheap rate. This not only helped them sustain their own families, their low priced products were also

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affordable for the marginal people struck by the Covid-19 crisis. Pandemic made their life precarious. Yet the pandemic made them fight for the survival of their dear ones. Economically, they became self-reliant even though to a small degree. The Covid-19 pandemic taught them one thing for sure. Their struggle had to start from the basic. It was not a story from rag to riches. Life began from the scratch. Everything was uncertain. Covid-19 had eradicated at times two generations of people. Many lost their near and dear ones, friends, relatives, family members. Yet they survived and started to live anew. Help and assistance came from unknown quarters and in unexpected manner. Strangers came out to help the needy.

I, along with Dr. Punyabrata Gun and his team of physicians

went out to provide medical assistance to families in remote areas affected by Amphan as well as the pandemic. It was done on war footing. Groups of doctors and even their relatives and friends joined us in our mission to reach the distressed villagers. Help started pouring in from cross-sections of the society. Even subaltern sections of population came forward to help the most adversely affected ones. Fruit-sellers, local vendors, and men and women on the street came forward to save “Life”. This was HUMANITY.

5

The West Bengal Doctors Forum, SSU, set up the Raidighi Medical Camp with the help of Rashbehari Shailushik, Bikalpa Achhe and Pratibandhi Sammilani. There was a team of ten Doctors and 16 volunteers. Around 100 patients were given

treatment on a single day. Patients with fever, cough and cold, and skin disease, and the diarrhoea affected children were treated. The camp functioned from 10 a.m. to 3.00 p.m. The Rotary Club of Avanya provided sanitary napkins to women. This was an instance of medical camp enthused by a spirit of solidarity and based on the coordination between the Doctors and the volunteers.

6

On 13 June 2020, another camp was set up in Heramba-Gopalpur village of Patharpratima, and in Kuimari Village. Rashbehari Shailushik and Bikalpa - Achhe helped the West Bengal Doctors Forum (SSU) in this endeavour. We had to cross the river in Ferry boat. It was raining heavily which made our task very difficult. There were 4 doctors and 16 volunteers. The village

was among the most critically affected. They could not come down from their roof as flood water had submerged their ground floor. Their source of potable water was gone and flood water had increased the salinity of the ponds there. In all, 361 patients were treated by the doctors group. Some of them were injured, some affected by skin diseases. Influenza and worms related diseases also affected them. The situation was dismal. Pandemic and the cyclone had combined to create a devastating situation. Yet the pandemic taught us to face the crisis collectively and resolutely.

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In view of the failing health care system in the backward areas, health camps should be regularly held in our country. Doctors will be available if such serious endeavours are made. I

myself offered my service for such camps.

However people are not educated enough to understand the various consequences of addictions to cigarettes and bidi. They fail to realise that the consumption of gutkha or country liquor may be fatal for them. I am shocked when I come across patients who complain of chest pains yet they boast that it is impossible for them to give up smoking cigarettes or bidi as that would impair their working ability. They do not realise that they are basically jeopardising their own lives. Lack of awareness among people about the potential of various substances like tobacco, alcohol and drugs in ruining one's health is enormous, and it can be disastrous for the country. This lacuna in our psyche goes unaddressed by our Government and community

at large. Poor people do not understand that substance abuse increases the chances of ill-health and adversely affects household economy. Poor health increases women's burden in every household, particularly in a poor household. I feel it is the responsibility of our society to ensure that women are helped in coping with this scourge. A conscious and determined woman can exert pressure on her husband, son or father forcing the latter to refrain from smoking and consumption of alcohol or drugs. One can refer to the sustained anti-arak movement in Andhra Pradesh. It was the most effective social reform movement in restructuring the rural economy and restoring healthy family life.

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The problem which haunts me as a physician/surgeon

relates to the gender dimension of our society. Access to medical facilities is greatly impaired in case of women. Poverty stricken Indian society is extremely insensitive towards the problems faced by women in almost all the parts of our country. Male are either ignorant or callous towards the difficulties of women. I can at least speak of the health care situation. Men fail

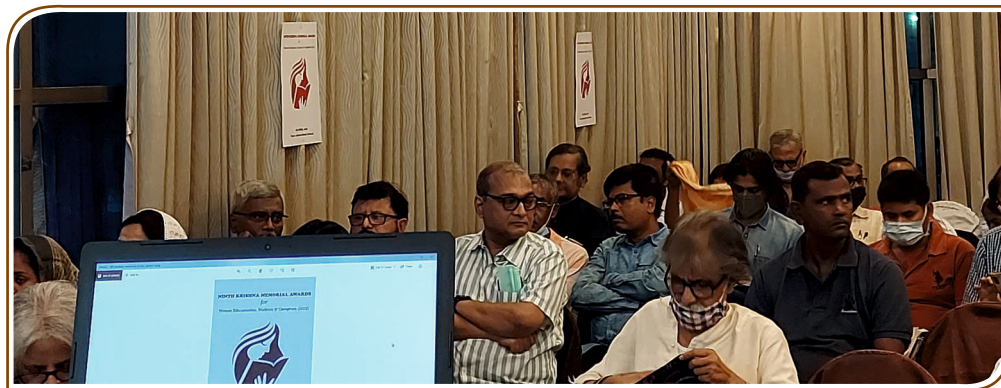
10 to understand that unless women in our society possess sound health, our children will never grow into healthy citizens. Poverty coupled with ignorance, and all kinds of atrocious superstitions are denying a huge section of Indian women the most basic health facilities notwithstanding the much proclaimed health policies of the Government of India or the state governments. In order to facilitate access of the marginalised women in rural

and suburban areas to available health care facilities, intermediary health workers known as ASHA workers were employed by the Government. However they are lowly paid or often do not get paid regularly. This has further adversely affected the health schemes of the Government. It has been observed that marginalised women are mostly unaware of the regular health care measures, and in many cases they cannot avail whatever little health support is provided in the local health centres.

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Gender disparity is evident in our profession too. A 'Surgeon' is evidently taken as a male person. A 'Lady Doctor' is best conceived as a support staff to the Surgeon. She fits into the role of an 'anaesthetist'. However, my wife, who happens to be

an anaesthetist herself helped me to become what I am today, a successful surgeon. So, it is a ridiculous mind-set that cannot accept the idea that a lady doctor can be equally exceptional, and a successful surgeon, say a cardiac surgeon or a neurosurgeon. It is not an imperative that a lady doctor has to be at best an obstetrician. This hopeless role specification or role expectation stems from our social psyche. Gender discrimination is the worst kind of social malady. In this noble profession, capacity and talent should be the only consideration. Identity based on gender has no relevance.



Guests Listening the Ninth Krishna Memorial Lecture 2022 by Dr. Sunandan Basu.

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Subhas Ranjan Chakraborty Introducing the Ninth Krishna Memorial Awards Ceremony

14



Kalpana Kannabiran sharing her thought about the award programme.



Previous Awardees (Right to Left) Anil Mistry, Jenat Rehana Islam, Shahina Javed, Sujeda Khatun and Shantilata Tudu).



Ranabir Samaddar sharing his thought about the award.

15



Ashokendu Sengupta, Punyabrata Gun and other distinguished guests listening the lecture.

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Guests Listening the Ninth Krishna Memorial Lecture 2022 by Dr Sunandan Basu.



Amina Khatoon (one of the past awardees) sharing her thoughts.



Shantilata Tudu (one of the past awardees) shared her experience.

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Madhurilata Basu and Subhash Ranjan Chakraborty on the Ninth Krishna Memorial Awards Ceremony.

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Anil Mistry (one of the past awardees) sharing his thoughts.



Jinat Rehana Islam (one of the past awardees) sharing her thoughts.



Shahina Javed (one of the past awardees) sharing her thoughts.



Tuktuki Mondal (one of the past awardees) sharing her thoughts.



Late Krishna Bhattacharya
Distinguished Teacher of Education,
West Bengal Education Service

KRISHNA MEMORIAL AWARD 2022



Mr. Biswajit Mitra

Social Activist & Health Worker, Avijit
Mitra Memorial & Charitable Society



Dr. Subrata Goswami

Deputy Director (Medical), ESI MB
Scheme & Founder and Endowed Chair
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